

# FAITH AND REASON

**A witness of faith and hope in the midst of violence and persecution:** “Will you be my son’s spiritual father?” my mother asked Cardinal Van Thuan. He responded, “Yes, I will be like a father to him.” It was a crisp winter afternoon in the year 2001. My mother and I were invited for a visit at his office next to Santa Maria in Trastevere. At the conclusion of our conversation, mom made the request without first consulting me. I felt like one of the brothers when the mother of James and John went to Jesus and asked that each sit next to Him when he reigns in his kingdom. We all know how the rest of the disciples reacted. I managed to receive a promise from mom to never reveal this secret to anyone.

The gentle bishop was a source of pride for Vietnamese Catholics as a witness to the power of faith and hope in the midst of our very tragic history of violence, suffering and persecution. As a third-year seminarian, I was deeply touched by the meditations he had written in various books. These reflections touched on many familiar Christian virtues such as love, hope, humility, and service, but what was unique about them is that they were profoundly shaped by the ordeals of his life, especially the thirteen years of imprisonment, nine of them in solitary confinement.

It is one thing to read stories; it is another to hear them directly from the person who not only wrote them but lived them. I was excited for the opportunity to hear the stories from his own lips. To my utter surprise, I never got a chance to make this request. The bishop asked both of us questions of our origin, our faith, my parents’ vocation, my vocation, what I liked most about Rome, how were my studies and similar questions. He was just as interested in us as we were in him. Before we knew, the hour had flown by and it was time to say goodbye.

Walking back, I was not disappointed. The stories did not need to be retold by words; they were transmitted through experience. This is what it feels like to be with one who has been humbled by suffering, lived in the present by having endured excruciating agony, docile to the Word through forced silence and solitude, remembered that he is loved through the presence of Word and sacrament. I was both inspired and profoundly challenged.

Meeting this man of God was an experience of renewing my own roots to Vietnam, a country devastated by continual invasions from outsiders culminating in civil war and the collapse of the South to communist North and suppression of the practice of the Christian faith. Being both exiles from our own homeland, we feel the words of Psalm 137, “by the rivers of Babylon there we sat and wept, remembering Zion; on the poplars that grew there we hung up our harps.” Within that first year of his imprisonment, I was born. My family lived under the same cruel regime and escaped by boat five years later. I struggle to forgive the wrongs they have done to us and our country. This man went through some of the worst of the violence and not only emerged free from bitterness but loved the very people who killed his relatives and imprisoned him. This is not human love, it is divine. He is to me both an inspiration and a provocation.

I continued to have short encounters with the gentle Cardinal throughout the year as he was very present and available to the numerous gatherings of Vietnamese clergy and religious of Rome. At the end of one of these gatherings, I approached him as we waited for his ride on the Gianicolo hill and asked if he were available to come to my diaconate ordination. He answered, “My son, I want very much to be there, but I’m afraid this cancer won’t allow me to travel. I will offer Mass for you on that day.” This Mass promise is indeed special for it comes from a priest who has for years, offered Mass in secret with three drops of wine and one drop of water in the palm of his hand. I was ordained a deacon in February and the gentle man of God returned to his Lord that September. He kept his promise; I felt his presence.

A father is first a son. As I am now called to be a spiritual father for my own community, I look back with gratitude for the fathers of my life. With his life and presence, Cardinal Van Thuan continues to inspire and challenge me to love as I have been loved. Thank you, Father. Love, your son. \***Abbot of St. Martin Abbey Lacey, Washington** By **FR MARION NGUYEN, OSB** \*

**The Heart of God:** The Old Testament speaks of God’s heart twenty-six times. It is regarded as the organ of his will, against which man is measured. It is the Logos which is at the center of us all - without our knowing - for the center of man is the heart, and in the heart there is the guiding energy of the whole, which is the Logos. It is the Logos which enables us to be logical, to correspond to the Logos; he is the image of God after which we were created... It is here, in the heart, that the birth of the divine logos in man takes place, that man is united with the personal, incarnate Word of God... The heart is the place of the saving encounter with the Logos. The pierced heart of Jesus is not concerned with self-preservation with self-surrender. It saves the world by opening itself.... The heart saves, indeed, but it saves by giving itself away. Thus, in the heart of Jesus, the center of Christianity is set before us.

It expresses everything, all that is genuinely new and revolutionary in the New Covenant. The heart calls to our heart. It invites us to step forth out of the futile attempt of self-preservation and, by journey in the test of love, handing ourselves over to him, and with him to discover the fullness of love which alone is eternity, and which alone sustains the world. **Pope Benedict XVI**

**The following verse I hope will deepen your union with Jesus:** Some critics in Augustine's day were very upset by his words "Love and do what you will" In their mind, he seemed he seemed, to be saying, "If only you do something out of love, then whatever you do cannot be evil". Of course, this is not what Augustine meant. What he was saying was, that if you love in such a way that the two great commandments love of God and love of neighbor - are fulfilled, then our actions cannot help but be good. He also was saying that good acts that come from evil intentions are not in fact good. God wants us to act out of love as a means of observing his two great commandments of love. If we could do that, then our salvation would be assured.

Fear not little flock, it has pleased the father to give you the "kingdom". Some critics in Augustine's day were upset by his words "Love and do what you will". In their minds he seemed to be saying, "If you do something out of love, then whatever you do cannot be evil" Of course this is not what Augustine meant. What he was saying was that, if you love in such a way that the two great commandments - love of God and love of neighbor - are fulfilled, then our actions cannot help but be good. He was also saying that good act that come from evil intentions are not in fact good. God wants us to act out of love as a means of observing his two great commandments of love. If we could do that, then our salvation would be assured.

**Thoughts of Him:** Far tucked inside the silence of daylight growing dim, there dwells serenity, and peace of heart, in loving thoughts of Him. He, who is Mighty; the Maker of all things Creates the beauty in all lives, of Him the Angels sing. Who is this Maker that we call The Great and Glorious One? He is Loving, He is Life, God...our Father, and the Son, God the Spirit; Trinity.... We praise our Heavenly Friend, And give thanks, that humbly we can share This love which hath no end.

**Unable to Pray:** When the spiritual person cannot pray, let him learn to be still in God, fixing loving attention on God in the calm of his understanding although he may think of himself as doing nothing. Little by little divine calm and peace will be infused into his soul.

#### **A Thought For the Day**

<b>Sunday</b>	You are infinitely precious because you are loved by God.
<b>Monday</b>	Charity is to be measured, not by what one has given away, but by what one has left.
<b>Tuesday</b>	Man wants three things: life, knowledge, and love.
<b>Wednesday</b>	The danger today is in believing there are no sick people, there is only a sick society.
<b>Thursday</b>	Counsel involving right and wrong should never be sought from a man who does not say his prayers.
<b>Friday</b>	At Cana, Mary gave Him as a Savior to sinners; on the Cross, He gave her as a refuge to sinners.
<b>Saturday</b>	Being is the soul of every concept, of every judgment and of every reasoning.

**Gospel:** Mt 5:1-12a When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven."

Very harmful effects can follow accepting the philosophy which denies personal guilt or sin and thereby makes everyone nice. By denying sin, the nice people make a cure impossible. Sin is most serious, and the tragedy is deepened by the denial that we are sinners...The really unforgiveable sin is the denial of sin, because, by its nature, there is now nothing to be forgiven. By refusing to admit to personal guilt, the nice people are made into scandalmongers, gossips, talebearers, and super critics, for they must project their real if unrecognized guilt to others. This, again, gives them a new illusion of goodness: the increase of faultfinding is in direct ratio and proportion to the denial of sin... **Fulton J. Sheen**

**In His Will is Our Peace**  
**Fr. William C. Mooney**

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